STALKE
GALLERI
STALKE OUT OF SPACE

# Nils Erik Gjerdevik meet Albert Mertz

## (new Location Vesterbrogade 184)

31.1 to 7.3.2003

**Stalke Galleri inaugurated its new premises at Vesterbrogade 184 with the exhibition "NILS ERIK GJERDEVIK MEETS ALBERT MERTZ."**

Stalke Galleri announced the opening of its new premises at Vesterbrogade 184. After spending the 1990s in a building where more than 150 exhibitions were held in the "underground gallery" in the backyard, the gallery chose to focus on the artists and itself in a slightly smaller but significantly more intimate exhibition space with a large storefront facing the street.

With the establishment of Stalke's new department, Gallery Kirke Sonnerup, and the ongoing series of Stalke Out Of Space projects, the intention was to position Stalke Galleri in Copenhagen as a more classical gallery. In connection with the relocation, a permanent project space was also established within Stalke Gallery, running parallel to the gallery's regular exhibition program.

For the inaugural exhibition, Stalke Galleri was particularly pleased to present Albert Mertz and Nils Erik Gjerdevik in dialogue. Although Mertz had taken leave of life after thirteen years marked by illness, his distinctive body of work—with its unique blend of humorous popular culture references, experimental drive, conceptual precision, and spiritual dedication—continued to radiate vitality and inspire both contemporary artists and current artistic discourse. Stalke Galleri had last exhibited Mertz as one of the students from the Academy of Fine Arts, in an exhibition curated by Jens Brinch and Søren Andreasen.

In this exhibition, Nils Erik Gjerdevik installed Albert Mertz's works on the walls of Stalke Galleri—more precisely, on walls that Gjerdevik himself had painted directly. In his investigations of Denmark's enigmatic and complex universe, Gjerdevik had previously worked with wall paintings, but this marked the first time these functioned as the background for another artist's works. Gjerdevik presented lesser-known aspects of Mertz's production from the 1970s and 1980s, creating a visual, conceptual, and physical space for dialogue between the two artists. The exhibition focused on color, compositional peculiarities, and questions surrounding signs of health as shared points of reflection.
The exhibition was realized with the assistance of Lone Mertz

Kim Bendixen (center) and Sam Jedig (right)

**Reviews of the Exhibition**

Two Danish newspapers reviewed the reopening of Stalke Galleri at its new premises on Vesterbrogade, where the inaugural exhibition presented a dialogue between Albert Mertz and Nils Erik Gjerdevik.

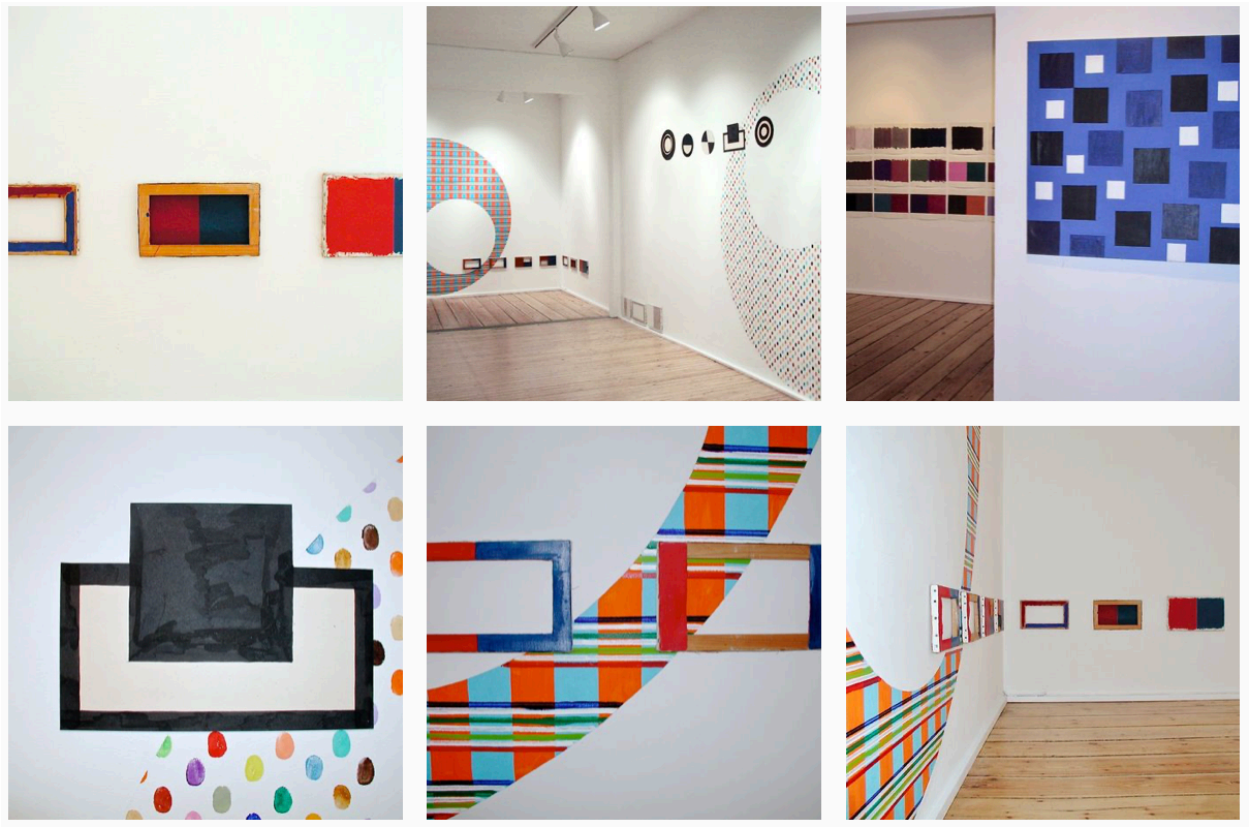
Torben Weirup, writing in Berlingske Tidende, described the reopening as a significant moment for one of Copenhagen's most prominent galleries. He emphasized that Stalke Galleri, after relocating to brighter and more visible premises on Frederiksberg, opened with a meaningful dialogue between the late Albert Mertz and Nils Erik Gjerdevik. Although more than twelve years had passed since Mertz's death, Weirup stressed that Mertz's importance as an artist and as a charismatic professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts remained strong, particularly through his lasting influence on younger generations of artists.

Weirup highlighted how Gjerdevik's large-scale wall paintings created a powerful spatial framework for Mertz's works, allowing Mertz's characteristic red and blue imagery to re-emerge with renewed clarity. He noted that the exhibition underlined Stalke Galleri's long-standing role in presenting key figures of Danish conceptual and experimental art, while also reaffirming the gallery's commitment to international dialogue and artistic continuity.

In Politiken, Birger Thøgersen focused on the broader cultural and urban context of the gallery's move. He wrote that contemporary art in Copenhagen had physically and symbolically "moved outward" from the city center, and that Stalke Galleri's relocation to Vesterbro and Frederiksberg reflected this shift. Thøgersen described the new gallery space as open, accessible, and closely connected to everyday life, stressing that art here was not something distant or exclusive, but something one could encounter freely.

Thøgersen paid particular attention to the exhibition's intergenerational dialogue. He noted that Albert Mertz, though deceased for over a decade, appeared strikingly present through his works and through the way his artistic thinking continued to resonate with younger artists such as Nils Erik Gjerdevik. Gjerdevik's wall-based works were described as both a tribute and a contemporary continuation of Mertz's legacy, emphasizing Mertz's blend of popular imagery, conceptual rigor, and human warmth.

Together, the two reviews portrayed the exhibition as both a reopening and a reaffirmation: of Stalke Galleri's historical significance, of Albert Mertz's enduring influence, and of the gallery's ambition to keep art active, visible, and engaged with life beyond the traditional gallery setting.



Nils Erik Gjerdevik meet Albert Mertz, 2003, Installation view, Stalke Galleri

Summary: Interview with Nils Erik Gjerdevik

(Weekendavisen, interview by Lisbeth Bonde)

The interview presents Nils Erik Gjerdevik as an artist whose practice is fundamentally concerned with releasing painting from gravity, fixity, and predetermined meaning. His work consistently seeks to dissolve traditional ideas of stability, composition, and narrative, allowing paintings to appear light, floating, and open—both visually and conceptually.

Gjerdevik describes painting as a field of experimentation in which control and chance coexist. He deliberately employs processes, repetitions, and material choices that introduce unpredictability, enabling the work to evolve rather than be fully planned in advance. This approach keeps the paintings open, not only in their making but also in their reception, inviting viewers to engage without being directed toward a single interpretation.

A central theme in the interview is movement and balance. Through circular forms, rhythmic structures, and subtle shifts in color and surface, the paintings create a sense of motion and spatial ambiguity. Rather than anchoring the viewer, they encourage a bodily and perceptual experience that unfolds over time.

The conversation also situates Gjerdevik's work in relation to art history, particularly modernist investigations of color, form, and abstraction. However, he does not seek to revive or quote specific traditions. Instead, he treats painting as an ongoing inquiry into its own basic elements—color, surface, rhythm, and space—reframing them for a contemporary context.

Gjerdevik expresses a clear resistance to monumentality and authoritative gestures. His works do not aim to dominate the exhibition space but to exist within it quietly and attentively. Meaning arises through proximity, duration, and the viewer's own perceptual engagement rather than through overt symbolism or fixed messages.

Overall, the interview portrays Nils Erik Gjerdevik as an artist who understands painting as a dynamic, open system—a space where gravity is suspended, certainty is avoided, and perception itself becomes the primary subject.

Front Cover, Catalogue

**Summary of Jacob Lillemose's Catalogue Text (2003)**

Jacob Lillemose frames the encounter between Albert Mertz and Nils Erik Gjerdevik as an ongoing journey rather than a fixed historical dialogue. Using a series of imagined "scenarios," he presents their relationship as one based on movement, experimentation, and a shared resistance to closure, certainty, and definitive conclusions.

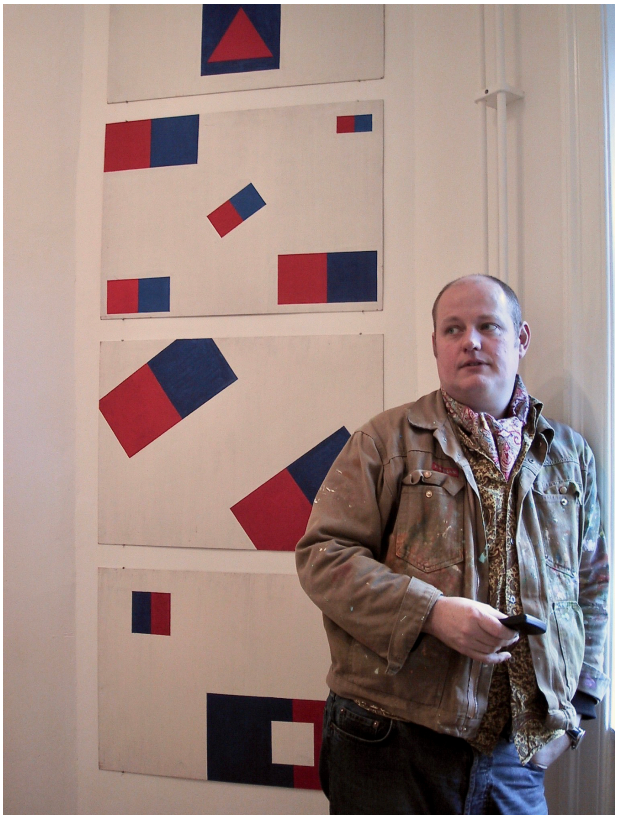
A central theme is failure as a productive force. Drawing on Samuel Beckett's notion of "failing better," Lillemose argues that both artists embrace risk, error, and incompleteness as essential conditions for artistic vitality. Their works deliberately avoid perfection, finality, and applause, instead remaining open, provisional, and honest.

Gjerdevik's installation of Mertz's works is described as an exploration of mobility and autonomy. Rather than treating the artworks as isolated objects or constructing a closed totality, the installation emphasizes flexibility, recontextualization, and peripheral attention. Gjerdevik's painted wall structures disrupt the neutrality of the white cube and function as active backgrounds that frame, rather than dominate, Mertz's works.

Lillemose highlights Mertz's position as a committed outsider in Danish art. Despite his institutional roles and historical influence, Mertz consistently resisted academic dogma, stylistic conformity, and nationalist aesthetics. His use of red and blue, informed by American conceptualism and Fluxus attitudes, replaced expressive pathos with reflective openness and subtle political engagement.

Gjerdevik is presented as a parallel figure—also operating somewhat outside established norms. His approach to hanging and living with artworks emphasizes intuition, everyday presence, and respect for the works' integrity. Art, in this view, must be seen and lived with to remain alive; it grows through use, proximity, and ongoing rearrangement.

Ultimately, Lillemose characterizes the dialogue between Mertz and Gjerdevik as sympathetic rather than authoritative. The installation does not seek originality or dominance but instead reframes Mertz's art in a way that underscores its philosophical depth, material presence, and imaginative openness. The focus remains on the periphery, the unfinished, and the continual movement of thought and form.



Nils Erik Gjerdevik, 2003, Stalke Galleri